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ABSTRACT

A Student Literacy Corps was established in 1991 at McNeese State University in Lake Charles, Louisiana. The corps provides intervention for at-risk Head Start students in a program designed to enrich literacy skills. The Student Literacy Corps has two components: (1) a tutoring program in which college students tutor 4-year-old Head Start children; and (2) a program to train parents to provide home experiences that reinforce what their children have learned in the tutoring program. The lessons in the tutoring program focus on the development of gross and fine motor skills, social skills, and language skills, and on activities that foster cognitive development. College professors provide parents with monthly training. Parents are given materials such as books, games, puzzles, and chalkboards to use with their children at home. A planned program evaluation will measure Head Start children's skill growth and assess the attitudes of the tutors, parents, and Head Start teachers involved in the program. Data from the evaluation will be used to compile a record of college student participation in the program. (BC)

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PRESENTATION DELIVERED AT THE 43RD ANNUAL SACUS CONFERENCE

March 23-28 in Tulsa, Oklahoma

PRESENTERS:

Dr. Phyllis Cuevas, Ms. Jeanette Dick, Dr. Judy C. Shaver, Dr. Beth Wise

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EARLY LITERACY PROJECT:

TUTORING AND PARENT TRAINING IN A HEAD START CENTER

Louisiana has the highest rate of illiteracy in the United States (U.S. Census, 1980). Almost 8% of the state's population cannot read or write. Coupled with a high rate of functional illiteracy and a 50% high school dropout rate, Louisiana's literacy problems are extensive.

The cycle of poverty and illiteracy is evident in the area served by McNeese State University in Lake Charles, Louisiana. The parishes in this region economically depend on agriculture, small local businesses, and the diminishing petrochemical industry. A sizable proportion of families are below poverty level. Over half of the children enrolled in public schools receive free or reduced lunches. A 1989 survey of Louisiana's AFDC population found that over 15% have less than a ninth-grade education. Young children from these families are not exposed to positive role models for reading and their inability to be successful readers is evidenced by the large high school dropout rate.

Young non-readers in the state are growing up to be unsuccessful adolescents who drop out of school. Unable to find meaningful employment, many depend on social welfare programs for support. In addition, they cannot often provide home environments which would allow their own children to break the poverty cycle and become able readers.

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EARLY LITERACY PROJECT

A Student Literacy Corps was established at McNeese State University through a grant from the United States Department of Education and funded for 1991-93. The Corps provides additional intervention for at-risk Head Start students. The program is designed to enrich literacy skills to better prepare children for successful first grade learning experiences. Students who have early success in school are more likely to develop positive self concepts and to continue in school rather than drop out. A parent training component enables parents to reinforce skills at home with instructional materials furnished by the project. With efforts directed at early intervention rather than remediation, long-term benefits are sought.

DESCRIPTION OF STUDENT LITERACY CORPS

The Student Literacy Corps consists of two components. The first is a tutoring program in which college students tutor four-year olds in a Head Start Center. The second component is parent training for parents of the children being tutored.

College students enroll in Education 103: Seminar for Teacher Aides for three hours credit. There are no restrictions on who may register for the course. The course combines formal study in child development and teaching strategies with practical experience with small groups of four-year old children. College students must complete sixty hours of volunteer, uncompensated service in the Head Start Center for course credit. In the fall of 1991, eight students enrolled in the course and nine students enrolled in the Spring of 1992.

Tutors are provided with a Tutor Handbook and given instruction in its use before tutoring begins. The Tutor Handbook was written by college professors with expertise in early childhood education using the Head Start curriculum as the basis for developing lessons. The Handbook develops skills in the areas of motor,

social, language, and cognitive development. To reinforce the lessons taught by tutors, college professors also provide monthly parent training. Parents are given materials such as books, games, puzzles, and individual chalkboards to use with their children at home.

DESCRIPTION OF TUTORING AND PARENT TRAINING

MOTOR SKILLS

Lessons focus on gross and fine motor skills. Lessons on gross motor skills deal primarily with large muscles and activities focus on:

1. Body Control
    a. walk a straight line
    b. walk a circular line
2. Movement
    a. jump in place using both feet
    b. hop on one foot in place
    c. hop on other foot in place
    d. skip using alternate feet
3. Coordination
    a. throw a beanbag
    b. throw a soft ball to a partner
4. Balance
    a. step on footprints using alternate feet
    b. march in a line using footprints
    c. jump on footprints using both feet
    d. hop on footprints using one foot
    e. move on footprints as they choose

EARLY LITERACY PROJECT

Lessons on fine motor skills deal with the small muscles and activities focus on:

1. Using clay
    a. make a ball out of clay
    b. make a flat pancake
    c. roll a "snake"
    d. make small beads
    e. use a nail to make holes in clay beads
2. Lacing
    a. lace shoestring through lacing cards
    b. string beads for a necklace
3. Folding paper
    a. fold and crease paper horizontally
    b. fold and crease paper vertically
    c. fold and crease paper diagonally
4. Cutting paper with scissors
5. Gluing smaller paper objects on a larger page
6. Finger painting
    a. make a vertical line, horizontal line, and a cross
    b. make geometric shapes
    c. make letters or numerals
7. Drawing a crayon or pencil
    a. trace around a shape
    b. draw a person unaided
8. Complete a three piece puzzle

Parent training began by giving parents a list of the motor skills that their child was working on at school. Parents were shown how to reinforce these skills

at home. For example, at a fall session, each family was given a four-inch foam ball, a jump rope, and a book. They were instructed to use the foam ball to help the child learn to throw accurately and catch the ball. The distance between thrower and catcher should be extended with practice. Parents were shown how to use the jump rope for walking on a line, jumping over and finally as a "jump rope." The reading of a book was demonstrated with emphasis on parent-child interaction. Parents were also given a hand-out with suggested supplementary activities to develop gross and fine motor skills. It was suggested that these hand-outs be placed on the refrigerator door as a reminder. In the spring training, fine motor skills were discussed and parents were given small chalkboards and chalk.

SOCIAL SKILLS

Social skill instruction focused on helping children learn how to express their feelings in positive and socially acceptable ways. The goal was to enable children to understand their own feelings. A positive approach was used with an emphasis on acceptance of the child and the child's current feelings and attitudes. Target behavior was modeled with much repetition and reinforcement. Small posters were used to teach each skill. Lessons included the following topics:

1. Listening
2. Using Nice Talk
3. Saying Thank You
4. Waiting Your Turn
5. Trying When It Is Hard
6. Sharing
7. Wanting To Be First
8. Being Honest

To reinforce social skills at home, parent training helped parents to understand the importance of these skills. Parents were given copies of the teaching posters used at school. It was suggested that parents place these posters on the refrigerator as a daily reminder. Parents were given a game to reinforce the skills of taking turns. Books and suggestions for their use were given to parents to develop skills in trying when it is hard and sharing.

LANGUAGE SKILLS

Language skill development centered on immersing the child in language through a variety of activities emphasizing hands-on experiences. The following topics were included:

1. Identifying Common Objects
    a. At Home
    b. At School
2. Using Prepositions (In, Out, Over, Under, etc.)
3. Show Me How (Talk About Actions)
4. Show Me Where (Talk About Where Common Articles of Clothing are Worn)
5. Do What I Do (Action Words)
6. Rhyme Time (Nursery Rhymes)
7. Telephone Time (Correct use of Telephone)
8. The Touch Me Book (Sense of Touch)
9. If, Then What? (Picture discussion involving what might happen.)
10. The Three Billy Goats Gruff (Story discussion)
11. Listening Time (Sense of Hearing)
12. The Very Hungry Caterpillar (Sense of Taste)

To reinforce language skills, parents were given monthly calendars with suggested activities. Parents were encouraged to work with their children by

taking walks around the neighborhood, playing simple "I Spy" games, and telling stories. Parents were given games and books for use at home. "Lap reading" was demonstrated to parents using one of the four-year olds in the audience. In addition one take-home packet contained a variety of nuts (common objects) to be shared with the family.

COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT

The cognitive area includes intellectual functions such as reasoning, problem solving, and knowledge. Lessons begin at the concrete level, relating the concept to the child using much repetition and verbalization. The next step is using pictures to stimulate concept and language development. Skills include:

1. Measurement (Introduction to longer, shorter)
2. Size (Big, Little)
3. Position (Top, Bottom)
4. Weight (Introduction to light, heavy)
5. Texture (Smooth, Rough, Hard, Soft)
6. First, Second, Third, Last
7. Money (Introduction to Penny, Nickel)
8. Shapes (Circle, Square, Triangle, Rectangle)
9. Numerals (One, Two, Three, Four)
10. Numerals (Five, Six, Seven)
11. Numerals (Eight, Nine, Ten)
12. Colors (Red, Blue, Green, Yellow)

Parent training sessions in cognitive skills were similar to sessions for other skills. Parents were given an overview of tutoring in this area and shown how they could stimulate the thinking of their children. Take-home packets included books and small toys for use by parents.

EVALUATION OF PROJECT

The project will be evaluated in several ways. Skill growth will be measured using the Learning Accomplishment Profile (Chapel Hill Training-Outreach Project). This instrument is currently being used in the Head Start Center as a pre and post test. Student growth will also be measured with anecdotal records made by university students during the tutoring sessions. One dramatic change has already been noted by one tutor. This tutor works with a child that seldom ever talks to her or to the classroom teacher. By the end of the tutoring she reported a willingness on the part of the child to participate in many of the activities.

The project will also be evaluated with quantitative records. Tutors completed a total of 180 hours of volunteer work in the Head Start Center. A total of 108 students were tutored. Individual tutoring time for students varied from a low of fifteen hours to a high of seventy hours with an average of forty hours per student. Parent training sessions averaged an attendance of twenty parents per session.

Changes in attitudes will also be measured using instruments developed for that purpose. Attitudes of tutors toward the children, the Head Start Program, and community service will be assessed. Parent attitudes toward the social skills of their children were assessed before and after training which was completed in January. Parents noted a change in their children in speaking in a friendly manner from 48% (pre) to 73% (post) in using this skill often. A change of 36% to 73% was noted in children almost always saying "thank you." Head Start teachers will also be surveyed to determine their impression of the effectiveness of the project.

EARLY LITERACY PROJECT

SUMMARY

The Student Literacy Corps established at McNeese State University is working toward meeting the needs of disadvantaged pre-school children and their parents. In the process, university students are being exposed to community service in a positive, productive atmosphere. Even with partial evaluation data available, it is evident that tutoring of disadvantaged children can make a difference in the development of literacy skills.